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ARTICLES:

(1) Discord growing between Japan, South Korea; Japan to conduct maritime survey near Takeshima later this month; Tokyo alarmed at Seoul's economic assistance to Pyongyang over abduction issue

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Abridged)

The relationship between Japan and South Korea is already sour

due to Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine and other issues. Tensions are likely to rise even further with Japan's plan to conduct a maritime survey later this month around Takeshima, a group of disputed islets known as Dokdo in South Korea. There is a growing backlash from South Korea. Tokyo is also visibly concerned about Seoul's move to consider massive economic assistance to Pyongyang in exchange for returning South Korean nationals abducted to North Korea.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe called yesterday Japan Coast Guard Commandant Hiroki Ishikawa to the Prime Minister's Official Residence to order him to send off a research vessel as planned, while giving full consideration to safety. Abe also told a press conference, "We must deal with the matter in a levelheaded manner so that it will not affect other issues."

Japan has been lagging behind South Korea in conducting a maritime survey and naming places in the area. Tokyo's readiness to face a fierce reaction from Seoul comes from its determination to catch up with South Korea. The oceanic area in question is in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claimed by both Japan and South Korea. Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi said: "Despite Japan's protests, South Korea has been conducting maritime surveys around Takeshima for the last four years."

According to South Korea's National Oceanographic Research Institute, the country has independently named 18 spots in the sea area in the vicinity of Takeshima. South Korea now aims at winning international recognition for such names at an international conference in June. Reportedly four of those places lie inside Japan's EEZ. Tokyo fears that Japan's inaction would end up boosting South Korea's de facto control over Takeshima.

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Tokyo is lobbying Seoul to take joint steps in dealing with North Korea based on DNA test results that showed a high likelihood of the husband of abductee Megumi Yokota being South Korean. But that goal, too, seems to be elusive.

In the South-North cabinet-level talks scheduled to begin April 21, Seoul intends to broach the issue of South Koreans abducted by North Korea and offer to extend economic assistance to the North in exchange for resolving the issue. A Foreign Ministry official said alarmingly, "Economic assistance in connection with the abduction issue would send the wrong message to the North."

Prime Minister Koizumi told reporters yesterday, "South Korea's circumstances differ from Japan's. Japan will continue to stick to a dialogue-and-pressure approach."

(2) Shaking world - changing power dynamics: Japan's diplomatic inability, its diplomatic vacuum in Asia

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 1) (Full)
April 18, 2006

The scene is Washington, D.C., in mid-March. Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi was received by Bush administration officials, who were unusually prickly. The reason was the Iran issue.

US distrustful of Japan

"Iranian President Ahmadinejad is outrageous. Japan has no time to waste." Such a remark came from Deputy National Security Advisor Crouch, Under Secretary of State Burns, and Under Secretary of Defense Edelman during separate meetings (with

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Yachi). As if by arrangement, they all asked for Japan's cooperation to build a coalition against Iran.

Will Japan invest a vast amount of money in the Azadegan oil field project in Iran even if the issue of Iran's nuclear development program heats up? There was a hint of this sort of

question in remarks made by US officials, although they did not actually mention the name of Azadegan. Yachi told them, "We on the part of Japan, as a friend, will work on Iran to act properly." But the United States has a deep-seated distrust of Japan on Iran.

Japan endorsed the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after the terrorist attacks in the US in September 2001. By sending Self-Defense Forces (SDF) troops to Iraq on the mission of reconstruction assistance, Japan demonstrated its determination to work together. The Japan-US alliance has been enhanced to the level described as being the "best since the end of World War II," according to a US government official. But the Iran issue is too intricate to be solved under the "principles of the alliance." It has posed a difficult simultaneous equation to Japan.

As the US exhaustion progresses, chances of Japan being forced to make a difficult choice grow. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has emphasized the importance of ties with the US, but there is no sign that he will come up with any specific strategy to deal with such a situation. How can Japan deal with tasks for which the US remains unable to show guidelines or to which Japan cannot

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conform?

"Aid to Myanmar must be cancelled." This sort of view has recently cropped up in the US government. Reportedly, there is a growing discontent with Japan, which has continued assistance to the junta of that country. Japan argues against such a view: "If it is isolated from the international community, Myanmar will move closer to China." But the US, which sees human rights suppression as an important issue, simply shrugs off such a Japan.

A subtle difference is also seen between Japan and the US in responses to Indonesia, a major Islamic power. The US is becoming alarmed about a growing anti-US tendency in that country, while Japan is the largest customer of Indonesia's natural gas production. Japan and the US are less likely to take a concerted action toward Indonesia. What is more serious than that is the existence of a gap between Japan and the US in diplomacy toward China.

Last week, high-level officials from such countries as Japan, the US, South Korea, China, and North Korea gathered in Tokyo and discussed cooperation in Northeast Asia. Participants included government officials and private sector individual. The fate of the North Korean issue drew attention there, but the focus of closed-door debate was the confrontation between Japan and China.

A foreign policy expert from the US criticized Japan: "Excessively dwelling on paying homage to Yasukuni Shrine is undesirable for all of Asia." Following him, US Assistant Secretary of State Hill asserted: "The stagnant relations between

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Japan and China have stood in the way of cooperation in the Asia region." The US does not want to see tensions emerge in Asia at a time when it has enough trouble dealing with other issues like Iraq.

Business leaders in Japan, as well, are worried about the chill between Japan and China. Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren) Chairman Hiroshi Okuda commented: "It's important (for Japan and China) to have a summit meeting where the leaders of the two nations can frankly exchange views and understand the other side's thinking."

China on offensive

As if to fill the void made an absence of Japanese diplomacy in Asia, China is now on the offensive. Premier Wen Jiabao has already visited Cambodia and New Zealand this year. Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan recently raveled to Vietnam and Malaysia.

China is even rumored to be selling arms to Indonesia and the Philippines.

One idea for Japan to get out of this fix is to invite the foreign ministers of Central Asian nations to come to Japan in June to discuss a framework for cooperation in such areas as anti-terrorist measures, steps to stop the drug trade, and the environment. Central Asia is an important regions strategically, and already there is fierce rivalry growing there among the US, China, and Russia. If the discussions succeed, Japanese diplomacy in the region could take on additional importance.

"When Japan-US relations are in good shape, Japan can build good relationships with Asian nations," says Prime Minister Koizumi

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repeatedly, but how does he intend to make better use the alliance with the US for Japan's national interests? It is therefore necessary for Japan to have a complex approach to the problem, envisioning a changing diplomatic dynamic in the world.

(3) Ozawa's aggressive moves puzzle New Komeito; Planned reshuffle of party executives may need to be reviewed

SANKEI (Page 3) (Abridged)
April 18, 2006

The New Komeito is puzzled by Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Ichiro Ozawa's moves. Ozawa has referred to the possibility of joining hands with the New Komeito and met with the president of Soka Gakkai, a lay Buddhist organization serving as the party's largest support base. Such moves have set off alarms in the New Komeito that Ozawa is trying to drive a wedge between the LDP and the New Komeito. Some New Komeito members have begun mentioning the need for Representative Takenori Kanzaki to stay on beyond this fall and to review the party's strategy to deal with Minshuto.

Kanzaki told reporters yesterday about Ozawa's meeting with Soka Gakkai President Einosuke Akiya: "Mr. Ozawa simply paid a courtesy call on Mr. Akiya; that was all." Kanzaki was apparently trying to play down the Ozawa-Akiya meeting.

Akiya met with Ozawa for about 10 minutes on the evening of April 11 at the latter's sudden request. Shortly after becoming Minshuto president, Ozawa pointed to the possibility of cooperating with the New Komeito if it could keep a distance from the LDP. The Ozawa-Akiya meeting has sparked speculation that Ozawa would actively approach the LDP's partner.

From the Hosokawa administration through the Shinshinto (New Frontier Party) eras, Ozawa reportedly had connections strong enough to have direct talks with Soka Gakkai leaders without going through the Komeito. The New Komeito shares the view with Soka Gakkai that the party is closer to Minshuto than to the LDP when it comes to foreign policy and the social disparity issue.

The Ozawa-Akiya session surfaced under such circumstances. Only a handful of New Komeito members are hopeful that cooperation with Minshuto will help increase the party's profile and its voice toward the LDP. But most of the New Komeito members are simply perplexed. They have an allergic reaction to Ozawa's high-handed political style.

A senior New Komeito member noted: "Many members still hold resentment toward Mr. Ozawa, who badmouthed Komeito executives when he was a partner of our party." A Soka Gakkai executive spat out, "We must absolutely not team up with Ozawa." New Komeito Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Junji Higashi disapprovingly said last night: "Mr. Ozawa is untrustworthy. He first sets off a whirlwind, then becomes self-centered, and people leave him as a consequence."

Asked by reporters about the Koizumi-Akiya meeting, Prime Minister Koizumi yesterday noon bluntly said: "I don't know (what Mr. Ozawa is thinking about). You must ask him that question. The

LDP-New Komeito relationship is firm." Some New Komeito members fear that a relentless attack on the party will follow the provocation of Ozawa. A person connected with the New Komeito

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even suggested the possibility of making changes to the LDP-centered campaign cooperation strategy for next year's Upper House election.

Ozawa is also expected to affect the New Komeito's reshuffle of its executive members, planned for this fall. The party has been paving the way for the departure of Kanzaki and Secretary General Tetsuzo Fuyushiba and the appointment of Acting Secretary-General Akihiro Ota and Land, Infrastructure and Transport Minister Kazuo Kitagawa as new party executives. But a senior Soka Gakkai member said, "The party will have to think hard about who should join the new executive lineup."

(4) Interviews with Tsuneo Oshiro, Taku Yamasaki on USFJ realignment and its future course

YOMIURI (Page 17) (Full)
April 18, 2006

Now that the government and Okinawa Prefecture's Nago City have reached an agreement on the pending issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, Japan and the United States are in the final phase of intergovernmental consultations over the realignment of US forces in Japan in order to release a final report. The Yomiuri Shimbun interviewed Tsuneo Oshiro, a professor at the University of the Ryukyus, and Taku Yamasaki, chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's security affairs panel, to hear their views about problems that cropped up in the realignment talks and to explore the challenges lying ahead.

It's time for the government to reconsider how to aid local hosts: Oshiro

-- The government and the city of Nago have now agreed to lay down a V-shaped pair of airstrips in the coastal portion of Camp Schwab.

Oshiro: The agreement came out of the blue. Futenma is said to be the most dangerous base, and that was evident from the crash (of a Futenma-based US military helicopter) onto the campus of Okinawa International University in August 2004. It's desirable to relocate the airfield to somewhere outside Okinawa Prefecture or otherwise to an overseas location. But it's important for Okinawa as well to move it at the earliest possible date. It will not be easy to get (US) understanding, and the governor (of Okinawa Prefecture) will be tested on his negotiating capability.

-- How do you evaluate the realignment talks this time?

Oshiro: The schoolgirl rape incident of 1995 touched off the agreement of SACO (Japan-US Special Action Committee on Facilities and Areas in Okinawa). The government considered alleviating Okinawa Prefecture's base-hosting burden while attaching importance to bilateral security arrangements between Japan and the United States. The government, Okinawa Prefecture, and Nago City reached an agreement (on Futenma airfield's relocation to Nago). It took time, but the government finally set about carrying out an environmental assessment (of the relocation site and its environs). However, the government came up with a new plan in the interim report released in October last year. That was the idea of building an alternative facility in the coastal area of Camp Schwab. The government bypassed Okinawa in its decision-making process on this matter, and the government

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itself undermined its relationship of mutual trust with Okinawa Prefecture's Governor Inamine.

-- Do you think Okinawa Prefecture might have failed to cooperate

well?

Oshiro: The government decided on a basic plan (to build a sea-based facility at a site in waters off the coast of Nago City's Henoko district to take over the heliport functions of Futenma airfield). In the meantime, the governor has also cooperated on what he could. But the government said it could not carry out Futenma airfield's relocation because environmentalist groups campaigned against the plan. But that's wrong. The government didn't have the strong will to build a new facility offshore of Henoko. At the request of Okinawa Prefecture, the government made a cabinet decision to set a 15-year time limit on the US military's use of the new facility and to build that facility as a dual-purpose airport for joint military and civilian use. However, the government apparently didn't negotiate those two preconditions with the United States. The coastal installation plan adopted this time is to build the new facility in an area on the premises of a US military base, so the two preconditions were left out.

-- Okinawa has only grown distrustful of the government?

Oshiro: The United States will redeploy 8,000 Marines (from Okinawa) to Guam. In addition, the United States will also return its military bases located south of Kadena airbase. These burdenlessening plans were not included in the SACO agreement. This is a step forward toward dissolving Okinawa's excessive burden. The returning of bases in urban areas is also a plus, indeed. However, it does not seem to me that such a package can replace the preconditions the governor has demanded. The government should reconsider its aid (to Okinawa), including fiscal measures.

-- Concretely speaking?

Oshiro: Since the SACO accord, the government has invested approximately 300 billion yen in the development projects of Okinawa Prefecture and its base-hosting municipalities. However, the money was for government-set purposes only. Instead, the government should consider something like subsidies for the burden of base-hosting localities. It's desirable for local hosts to use the money for their own accountable purposes.

-- Do you see any change in the mindset of people in Okinawa Prefecture?

Oshiro: A Chinese submarine intruded into Japan's territorial waters, and North Korea is reportedly developing nuclear weapons. In such a situation, national security has become close to the residents of Okinawa. Historically, Okinawa was tilted toward China. However, Okinawa is situated near the border. So, the prefecture has to accept an appropriate burden.

-- What do you want the government to do about base issues?

Oshiro: The United States has shifted its national strategy to deal with terrorists, nuclear ambitions, and China. They agreed to move the Marines to Guam against such backdrops, but it's regrettable that they didn't fully account for that. After the

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1995 rape incident, the government set up a three-party consultative body for the foreign minister, the director general of the Defense Agency, and the governor of Okinawa Prefecture to talk about base issues and security affairs. But it ended after meeting only several times. The government should use such a consultative body to talk not only with Okinawa but also with other base-hosting localities.

Follow-up needed to translate agreement into action: Yamasaki

-- Japan has held consultations (with the United States over the realignment of US forces in Japan) for more than two years. But the government was out of step, particularly between the Defense Agency and the Foreign Ministry.

Yamasaki: That's true. It's unclear for a while which was the control tower. From the beginning, the government needed to hold interdepartmental discussions on this matter involving many of its sections--in addition to the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Agency. So the prime minister and his office should have taken the initiative from the start. Regrettably, the government was not well aware of how important it is to realign the US military presence in Japan.

-- Washington was reportedly frustrated at Tokyo's slow response.

Yamasaki: The United States has always had someone in charge of critical issues regarding its national strategy. For example, there was (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense) Campbell at the time of consultations on regional contingencies. And now, there's Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Lawless. This time, President Bush has entrusted Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld with everything about the (realignment) talks. The State Department is working together with him. Lawless briefs Rumsfeld almost everyday. Endorsed by Rumsfeld, Lawless has negotiated with Japan. However, the locus of responsibility was unclear in the Japanese government, and this irritated the United States.

-- What do you think is significant for the Japanese government to address the US military's realignment?

Yamasaki: During the post-Cold War decade, Japan considered its bilateral security alliance with the United States in anticipation of a crisis on the Korean Peninsula. But after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, there's another theme in terms of dealing with international terrorist networks. They're a global threat. Japan makes it a basic policy to maintain its national security under its security pact with the United States. That's Japan's basic stance, so Japan must properly coordinate with the United States. I mean that Japan should ready itself for newly emerging threats. In the process of realigning US forces in Japan, however, the United States wants the Self-Defense Forces to take over the duties of US forces as much as possible. That's a categorical imperative for the United States. Also, for Japan, Okinawa--which is home to 75% of all US military bases in Japan--is the Japan-US security arrangements' Achilles heel. So Japan needed to consolidate its security arrangements there. That's why Futenma relocation was at the center of (realignment) talks.

-- For all that, the government didn't provide sufficient explanations not only to Okinawa but also to other base-hosting localities, did it?

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Yamasaki: In the case of Futenma airfield, the government couldn't explain its relocation because the government had yet to decide on where to build an alternative facility for its relocation. The government explored the idea of integrating Futenma airfield's functions into the US Air Force's Kadena base and looked into the feasibility of relocating the airfield to an outlying island. In late September last year, the government decided on a plan to relocate the airfield to a coastal area of Camp Schwab. However, Futenma relocation has been left unattended for 10 years. The US government asked the Japanese government to get the local host's understanding without fail. It was the prime minister's initiative that resolved the situation. Prime Minister Koizumi promised to do so. In October last year, the Japanese and US governments released the interim report. After that, the Defense Agency negotiated in earnest with Okinawa Prefecture and Nago City.

-- Is it possible to translate the final report into action for sure?

Yamasaki: The role of Prime Minister Koizumi and his government is up until the final report. After that, it is the post-Koizumi government's role. When someone comes into office after Prime Minister Koizumi, the minister in charge (i.e., the defense chief) will also change. Okinawa is not the only problem. There are some other issues to resolve. For example, there's the

problem of Zama (in Kanagawa Prefecture) (i.e., a plan to move the command functionality of the US Army's 1st Corps from the US mainland to Camp Zama in the city of Zama, Kanagawa Prefecture). Besides, there's also the problem of Iwakuni (in Yamaguchi Prefecture) (i.e., a plan to redeploy a carrier-based wing from the US Navy's Atsugi Naval Air Station to the US Marine Corps' Iwakuni Air Station in the city of Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture). Someone will have to properly follow up the issue of realigning US forces in Japan to the end.

-- You preside over the LDP's security affairs panel. So you're the right person, aren't you?

Yamasaki: I'm concurrently in the post of chairman on the party's committee for the promotion of Okinawa. So I can do it for another year and a half or so, if I want to. During that time, we must get the bilateral agreement underway and hand over the job to the next person. That's important, I think. Okinawa Prefecture also will have someone else in charge. If so, it will be even more important for the government to continue to make efforts. For now, the government has no system or position to entrust someone with security issues. When thinking over the realignment issue this time, it's urgently necessary to raise the Defense Agency to the status of a ministry.

(5) Politics 2006: Ruling parties adopt constitutional referendum bill that would grant voting right to those 20 or older; Minshuto reluctant to go along with the draft bill

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
April 19, 2006

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner New Komeito agreed yesterday on a draft bill that would set procedures for amending the Constitution. The draft bill was formulated by the LDP on April 12. The ruling coalition intends to engage in a discussion on the draft with the

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main opposition party Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), aiming to pass it through the Diet during the current session.

Although the New Komeito had suggested the minimum age for granting voting rights be 18, it has now accepted the LDP's idea that the minimum age should be 20 since those aged 20 and over are permitted to vote in Upper and Lower House elections.

As to whether to restrict the media from reporting and forecasting the probable outcome, the draft proposes leaving decisions up to the media, but it calls for prohibiting television and radio spots for a week before the referendum day.

The ruling parties propose a debate and vote be conducted on individual amendments in principle, at the same time, but a debate and vote would be carried out on amendments to related articles and chapters.

Minshuto has already balked at accepting the draft bill for a referendum on amending the Constitution. Therefore, reaching an agreement between the ruling camp and the main opposition party will be difficult, even though the ruling coalition wants to submit the bill to the ongoing Diet session. Given such circumstances, whether the bill to set procedures for amending the Constitution will be enacted is uncertain.

"That's different from (our party's plan)," Minshuto President Ichiro Ozawa told reporters last evening. The largest opposition party has called for focusing on general principles, while the ruling coalition's draft focuses only on the specific constitutional reforms. With this in mind, Ozawa seems to have made this remark.

The draft proposal contains the ruling bloc's concession to Minshuto regarding whether to restrict the media and the minimum age for granting voting rights. "If the media are allowed to control themselves, there is no need to specify such in law,"

said a senior member of the LDP Research Commission on the Constitution.

Many Minshuto House of Councillors members are reluctant to go along with any constitutional referendum bill. They began to harden their stance toward the referendum bill, with one senior lawmaker saying, "It is impossible to pass the bill during the current Diet session. If the ruling coalition alone submits the bill, we will stubbornly oppose it by submitting counterproposals."

The ruling camp, however, intends to ask Minshuto to agree to jointly submit the bill. At yesterday's meeting, one participant said, "It is important to secure approval from the whole Minshuto members (including the Upper House)."

Some ruling camp members once called for submitting the bill to the Diet by the ruling parties alone. LDP Constitutional Research Commission Chairman Hajime Funada commented, however, "An important bill that would set procedures amending the Constitution should be passed by the Diet with more than two-thirds vote." The ruling camp, therefore, has judged that it would not be wise to ram the bill through the Diet.

Prior to the Lower House by-election in the Chiba No. 7 district, Minshuto has assumed the stance of facing down the ruling camp. A

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senior LDP Upper House member made this comment, "Depending on the outcome of the by-election, the idea of drafting a joint bill by the ruling parties and Minshuto may disappear."

(6) Editorial: US force realignment must be settled in a way to win public support

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
April 17, 2006

A meeting held recently in Tokyo between senior foreign and defense officials of Japan and the United States failed to reach an agreement.

Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga also met separately with US Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless on the sidelines of the senior working-level talks. But that, too, ended in failure.

The two countries are wide apart on how to split the cost of the relocation of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The US has asked Japan bear 75% of the estimated 10 billion dollars, or 1.8 trillion yen, for moving 8,000 US Marines to Guam. Japan has expressed its willingness to loan 3 billion dollars for building housing and other facilities.

When America's request for 7.5 billion dollars became clear in mid-March, we criticized it as extravagant in comparison to Japan's annual host nation support of 230 billion yen. We also pointed out a lack of clarity in specifics and the basis for the estimate.

Considering the fact that it was Tokyo that first requested the Guam relocation, it is natural for Japan to bear a certain percentage of the cost. But the US has been transforming its forces around the globe to suit its own needs. Japan might end up playing a role in America's new Asia strategy as a result of the Guam relocation.

We would like to see Tokyo and Washington conduct penetrating talks on the future role and nature of US forces in Japan along with negotiations on the cost sharing of the Guam relocation.

How and to what extent Japan should bear the cost? When working-level talks become deadlocked, there is no other way but to seek a bilateral political settlement at the highest or cabinet level. The cost must be split logically in line with the Japan-US security arrangements.

The question is whether the two countries can settle the issue in a way that wins public support. The other day at the Diet, Foreign Minister Taro Aso expressed the government's desire to reduce Japan's share to under 50% of the total cost. We do not understand why he had to mention such a specific figure at that point. Is it wise for the government to refer to a concrete figure at a time like this when a fierce tug-of-war is going on between Japan and the US?

Tokyo and Washington failed to meet the March 31 deadline for their final report on US force realignment. The failure is ascribable to the inability to convince local governments to accept the relocation of Futenma Air Station to the coastline of Camp Schwab, as well as the stalled cost-sharing talks.

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An ambiguous political settlement must be avoided, however. In order to maintain a healthy Japan-US alliance, each side must say what has to be said, and matters must be discussed thoroughly.

The realignment of US forces in Japan is part of the transformation of the US military around the world. The realignment also will direct Japan's security policy toward transformation and restructuring. The cooperative relationship between the Self-Defense Forces and US forces in Japan is expected to change drastically especially with the introduction of the missile defense system.

What does US force realignment mean for Japan? The government is accountable to answer such a fundamental question apart from the cost-sharing issue.

SCHIEFFER